

Melissa Ketcham, January 12, 2011

Diversity is not a term bound only to the combination of people of different races. It is a combination of people from every nation, every ethnicity, and every religion. The fight that African-Americans went through to stop the persecution pressing in from all sides is not over. It has taken on a new shape, and another cause. Religious discrimination is an important part of today's fight for equality, and it is a cause worth fighting for.

One of the founding principles of this great nation is the freedom of religion. The first people who came to this new world from Europe were escaping religious persecution. They came to these new colonies with the hopes of being able to freely practice their religion. The Founding Fathers so believed in this cause that they made protection for freedom of religion part of the First Amendment to our new country's Constitution. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Although the founding fathers did their best to establish all the freedoms that the new country would need, they were unable to establish rights based on race. When the problem arose, it was up to the generation of the problem to come up with a solution. It is now time for this generation to solve the problem of religious discrimination.

Great steps have been made toward equality for all the races. However, equality for all religions is a fight the world is still encounters. When African-Americans were being mistreated, they came together to gain what they knew was rightfully theirs. It is time for people everywhere to rise up in a peaceful resistance and tell the world what they want. Everyone deserves to be treated as equals, regardless of what they believe in. It is time to put an end to religious discrimination.

We, as a nation, need to address stereotypes about religions. Adhering to stereotypes creates an ill-conceived notion about a group of people that is hard to get around. By addressing

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and dispelling these stereotypes, we open ourselves up for discussions. By utilizing these discussions, we can break down the walls that keep the people of various religions separated. By using this understanding, we can learn more about ourselves, both as people, and as a nation.

One thing people fear above all else is the unknown. By keeping different religions far apart from one another, we offer ourselves few opportunities to learn about differences and similarities. This lack of knowledge and understanding leads to fear, which leads to discrimination and hate. When people start to hate one another, they become less willing to learn about the views of the other side. Each starts assuming they know what the other side believes, and neither of the sides consider the other may actually be different than they originally thought. These misconceptions start arguments that lead to very serious consequences.

With the ever-shrinking world that technology is giving us, it is important both for this generation, and even more so the next generation, to be accepting of people from all around the globe. By building this acceptance and tolerance in ourselves and our children, we help to prevent a repeat of tragedies like slavery and the Holocaust. It also allows our children to build partnerships and relationships with people all across the world. These partnerships and relationships allow the world to become a stronger and more peaceful place.

Addressing this issue of religious discrimination helps to address different facets of the same issues that were addressed during the Civil Rights Movement. Jobs will not be denied because of religion, medical care will not be denied because of religion, and most importantly, hate and fear will not be spread because of religion. By preventing these things, we make the world a better place for all its inhabitants.

As Martin Luther King Junior once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."